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RECOMMENDATIONS RESPECTING U.S. APPROACH
TO A SEPARATE ARMS CONTROL MEASURE FOR
OUTER SPACE

ISSUE

To determine what approach the United States should take to a separate arms control measure for outer space.

BACKGROUND

1. United States and Soviet disarmament proposals include provision in Stage I for prohibiting the placing in orbit of weapons of mass destruction. Present United States policy precludes raising the question of a separate measure to this end but contemplates that the United States would be willing to discuss the question if it is raised by other countries. The Soviet Union has expressed little interest in a separate arms control measure for outer space but has sought, in connection with the work of the United Nations Outer Space Committee, to prohibit the use of space for military intelligence purposes.

2. The Canadians have proposed that participants in the Geneva Conference issue a declaration prohibiting the placing in orbit of weapons of mass destruction. The

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Canadian proposal calls for advance notification of space vehicle launchings but does not provide for pre-launch inspection of space vehicles. A number of other countries have from time to time suggested prohibition of all military uses of outer space. Of the various suggestions which have been advanced, the Canadian proposal is closest in substance to that of the United States disarmament proposal.

3. The United States is not prepared to accept a ban on all military uses of outer space or, in particular, on the use of outer space for military intelligence purposes. However, it is important that the United States develop a well-defined position respecting the acceptability of various approaches to a separate arms control measure to prohibit the placing in orbit of weapons of mass destruction. Such a position is urgently required in preparation for the forthcoming session of the General Assembly and the subsequent resumption of the Geneva Conference. In this regard, it is an assumption of this paper that purely unilateral statements by the United States respecting its own intentions will not provide an adequate counter to international pressure for some type of outer space agreement and would not be as useful

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as an agreement (or a reasonable offer for an agreement) from the standpoint of inhibiting possible Soviet exploitation of its space capabilities for "terror" purposes.

ACDA RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Recommendations on the substance of a separate measure

a. The position of the United States respecting a separate arms control measure for outer space should be that this country favors a separate measure prohibiting the placing in orbit of weapons of mass destruction. The basis of such a measure should be as follows: (1) use of national capabilities to detect and track space vehicles; (2) no initial requirement for pre-launch inspection of space vehicles; and (3) provision for consultation at a future, unspecified time if additional assurance is considered necessary as the result of changing technological conditions or as the result of delay in arriving at agreement on Stage I of a disarmament program.

b. The United States should favor advance notification of space vehicle launchings as a logical and desirable concomitant of such a measure. However, if the Soviet Union should object to advance notification, the United States should not insist that it is a requirement of the measure.

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c. The United States should oppose and should not accept proposals to prohibit all military uses of outer space or any particular military uses of outer space other than the placing in orbit of weapons of mass destruction.

2. Recommendations on tactics*

a. The United States should explore privately with the Soviet Union the question of a separate arms control measure for outer space in order to determine, if possible without public debate, whether there is any prospect of agreement and, in any case, to obtain a better reading of the Soviet position.

(1) Private discussions should be initiated by the Secretary with the Soviet Ambassador on a schedule permitting at least a preliminary Soviet reaction during the early phases of the General Assembly and with a view to concluding such discussions before the resumption of the Geneva Conference.

(2) Any agreement which might be reached as the result of private discussions should be made public in the form of a joint statement or simultaneous statements. In the event that Chairman Khrushchev should attend the

* The problem of developing tactics for the forthcoming meeting of the United Nations Outer Space Committee

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General Assembly and meet with the President, announcement of an agreement might be made in connection with such a meeting.

(3) In the more likely event that no agreement were reached, the United States should offer the same proposal publicly or make known Soviet rejection of it.

b. Pending the outcome of such discussions, the United States should adopt the following approach at the General Assembly:

(1) The United States should reiterate the fact that although both the United States and the Soviet Union have some potential capability of placing weapons of mass destruction in orbit, this country, for its own part, does not regard such an approach as a rational military strategy and has no plans to use outer space for such purposes.

(2) The United States should make clear its view that although other types of weapons offer a more immediate hazard, a separate arms control measure prohibiting the placing in orbit of weapons of mass destruction would be useful from the standpoint of maintaining the present "non-armed" status of outer space. The United States should state that it is prepared to discuss the possibility of such a measure with the Soviet Union at any time, but

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the United States should not publicly reveal the terms of such a measure until private discussions have been concluded.

(3) The United States should oppose any substantive action by the General Assembly to deal with the matter but could, if the tactical situation made it desirable, support a procedural resolution calling either for consultation between the United States and the Soviet Union or for consideration of the matter by the Geneva Conference.

c. In the event that matter has not been resolved prior to the re-convening of the Geneva Conference, the United States should either reveal the terms of its proposal at the Conference or encourage the Canadians to modify their proposal along the lines preferred by the United States. In the latter case, the United States would merely express support of the revised Canadian proposal. In neither case would the United States press the matter as requiring urgent action.

3. Recommendations on supporting and related matters

a. The responsible agencies should immediately abandon the practice of describing military space launchings as "secret" and should place in effect the alternative

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approach which has been developed on an inter-agency basis and approved by the President (NSC Action 2454).

b. The responsible agencies should complete current reviews of national capabilities to detect and track Soviet space vehicles and should undertake or recommend necessary improvements. Appropriate priorities should be assigned. In this connection, consideration should be given to whether improvements are needed in assuring the timely availability of data from all sources to user agencies.

c. The responsible agencies should consider and report on: (1) the possible usefulness of inspector satellites or additional ground-based capabilities to identify the functions of satellites in orbit; and (2) the feasibility of neutralizing satellites in orbit through non-nuclear means.

d. The Departments of State and Defense, CIA, and ACDA should prepare a contingency plan for responding to possible Soviet claims or actions related to placing weapons of mass destruction in orbit.

DISCUSSION

1. Objectives of a separate measure

a. In the strictly military sense, the earth satellite does not appear likely for the foreseeable

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future to be competitive with the ballistic missile as a means of delivering nuclear weapons. Whether or not re-entry were used, the delivery of nuclear weapons of higher yields can be accomplished by ballistic missiles with greater reliability and accuracy and less cost.* However, the "introduction" of earth satellites for this purpose could have major psychological and political impact. At some point the Soviet Union may consider it advantageous to exploit its space technology for achieving such impact, relying on its temporary advantage in thrust to establish credibility of a claim to have achieved an earth satellite nuclear delivery capability and to support an argument that such a capability represented a decisive shift in the military equation.

b. Over a period of time it can be expected that higher thrust launching capabilities will be available to both countries, that the yield/weight ratio of nuclear weapons will continue to improve, that re-entry will become more accurate, and that the general reliability of space

* The terms of the proposed measure would affect earth satellites completing at least one orbit about the earth. The measure would not be suitable for dealing with ballistic missiles which might achieve partial orbits. In addition, it should be noted that the term "weapon of mass destruction" is generally construed as applying to chemical and bacteriological weapons as well as nuclear weapons. The use of earth satellites for delivering "CB" weapons appears even

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vehicles will increase. It is problematical whether such changes will make earth satellites more competitive with ballistic missiles, which will also be improving. However, other things being equal, it is not improbable that the United States and the Soviet Union will gradually drift into a race for space weapons. Whatever its strictly military effects, such a race would entail increased psychological strain and political tensions, substantial diversion of the resources of both countries, and additional risk of accidental war. There is some possibility of "non-armament" of outer space, but it will be very difficult to disarm outer space once space weapons have been introduced.

c. In view of the foregoing considerations, a separate arms control measure for outer space could serve the national security interests of the United States: (1) by making more difficult in the short-run the possible exploitation by the Soviet Union of the psychological and political impact of a claimed capability to use earth satellites to deliver nuclear weapons, and (2) by retarding, if not preventing, the gradual emergence of a space weapons race. Moreover, United States support of a separate

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measure to prohibit the placing in orbit of weapons of mass destruction would contribute to political defense of other military uses of outer space, in particular orbital optical systems, which the United States regards as legitimate and is not prepared to prohibit.

2. The question of pre-launch inspection

a. Particularly in view of differences over the issue of orbital optical systems, it may not prove possible to reach agreement with the Soviet Union on any type of separate arms control measure for outer space. However, it may be possible for the United States to propose a measure which the Soviet Union might have some difficulty in refusing. It seems clear that the Soviet Union will not at this time accept pre-launch inspection of space vehicles in connection with such a measure. United States insistence on pre-launch inspection would have the political disadvantage of appearing to seek a degree of verification disproportionate to the substance of the issue. Moreover, the United States itself would have misgivings about pre-launch inspection of certain of its space vehicles. Accordingly, a key question is whether the United States could accept a measure which did not include provision for pre-launch inspection.

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b. The principal considerations supporting the view that the United States need not insist on pre-launch inspection as an initial requirement are as follows:

(1) The military motivation for violation of a separate outer space measure would be low, and the military effect on United States security of Soviet violation or sudden abrogation of a separate measure would be small for the foreseeable future, particularly in view of increasing United States ballistic missile capabilities but also because of the technical difficulties of achieving an effective earth satellite nuclear weapons delivery capability. In any case, Soviet violation of a separate measure would present no greater military threat than a comparable Soviet action in the absence of a separate measure.

(2) In order to exploit a clandestine violation for psychological and political purposes, the Soviet Union would have to reveal the fact that a violation had taken place. The resulting loss in political prestige would have some deterrent value although the Soviet Union might consider a possible gain in military prestige as sufficient to outweigh such a loss. In any case, the problem confronting the Soviet Union would be more difficult than the problem confronting it today.

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(3) United States national capabilities provide a substantial capability to detect and track Soviet space vehicles. Although national capabilities are not adequate to identify all functions of Soviet space vehicles, they should at least provide warning of any excessive build-up of Soviet satellite population in those orbits most likely to be used in the near future for the purpose of delivering nuclear weapons against the United States. National capabilities are summarized in Annex .*

(4) Explicit retention of the right to open the question of the need for additional assurance would provide a hedge against such a build-up or against technological changes which might make violation more profitable (or dangerous) at a future time.

(5) The measure need not adversely affect the development by the United States of basic space technology which might be applied to development of earth satellite nuclear delivery systems if the United States should consider it necessary to reply "in kind" to possible Soviet violation or abrogation of the measure. The measure also need not adversely affect development of an improved anti-satellite capability should that appear desirable although

* To be provided separately.

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such a development would have to be pursued with due regard for its international implications.

c. The question of whether failure to insist on pre-launch inspection would establish a precedent for other arms control measures or for broader disarmament proposals is of some concern but does not appear to be an insurmountable objection. The United States could maintain: (1) that "non-armament" of outer space is in the long-run interest of both the United States and the Soviet Union; (2) that national capabilities can provide reasonable assurance relative to present assessments of the significance of possible violations; and (3) that the principle to which the United States adheres in all cases is that of securing assurance proportionate to the risk involved in any measure. It should be noted that, in any public discussion along the foregoing lines, the United States should identify the "national capabilities" in question as those concerned with detecting and tracking space vehicles in orbit. Public reference should not be made to capabilities for detecting Soviet space launchings.

d. Initial omission of pre-launch inspection from a separate measure need not be reflected in the corresponding outer space measure put forward in United States disarmament

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proposals. The United States should maintain that pre-launch inspection would be important during Stage I of a disarmament program since reduction of other types of delivery vehicles might increase the significance of violation of a prohibition on the placing in orbit of weapons of mass destruction.

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3. Possible role of advance notification

a. Since the practice of conducting "secret" space launchings has proved politically disadvantageous to the United States, the decision has recently been reached, although it has apparently not yet been implemented, to abandon this practice and to provide post-launch identification of military space vehicles in a generalized way (NSC Action 2454). Provision of advance notification would further improve consistency between the United States position that it is conducting only legitimate, non-aggressive space programs and the manner in which such programs are conducted. In the context of a separate outer space measure, a generalized statement of purpose should be adequate to represent a commitment that space vehicles being launched did not carry nuclear weapons. Such a statement would provide some protection of the United States against false accusations and would necessitate explicit Soviet falsification of any violation.

b. It has been maintained that advance notification would be disadvantageous to the United States since it would assist the Soviet Union in taking active or passive countermeasures against United States reconnaissance satellites. The primary effect of advance notification in these respects would appear to be some alerting of the

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the Soviet Union. Since the precise character of the United States satellite being launched would not be identified, since specific planned orbital elements would not be revealed, and since launching schedules are well-known to be subject to changes, it is not clear that advance notification would facilitate Soviet passive countermeasures without causing some disruption of the Soviet activities involved. Soviet ability to take active measures against satellites making only a limited number of orbits might be somewhat improved. However, it is difficult to determine one way or the other whether advance notification would have a decisive effect. In any case, the Soviet Union is today confronted with difficult political and legal problems if it wishes to take peacetime action against United States satellites. These problems are more difficult than those involved in the U-2 and RB-47 cases and would be further complicated by the existence of an agreement which prohibited only the placing in orbit of weapons of mass destruction.

c. On balance, it appears that advance notification would be a logical and desirable concomitant of a separate outer space measure. It is difficult to argue that it is essential, but it is equally difficult to see any convincing grounds for opposing it. Under these circumstances, the United States might reasonably take the position that it considers advance notification useful and desirable and

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Soviet Union will do so. In the event that the Soviet Union should object to advance notification, which it may find undesirable from its own point of view, the United States should not press the matter.

4. Tactical considerations.

a. In view of the divergence of United States and Soviet interests in outer space (resulting from the interest of the former in orbital optical systems and the possible interest of the latter in psychological exploitation of space "terror" weapons), there appears to be little likelihood that the two countries will be able to reach agreement on a separate outer space measure. The prospect of reaching agreement through private discussions may be somewhat better than that of reaching agreement through public debate; however, the objective of private discussions should not be to arrive at a "tacit understanding" but rather to arrive at an agreement which would be made public. If private discussions failed to produce agreement, they should at least provide additional forewarning of the probable/^{Soviet}position in a public debate.

b. It does not appear practical for the recommended course of action to be placed in effect before the meeting of the United Nations Outer Space Committee, beginning

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September 10. Tactics now being developed for this meeting, should reflect the view that action affecting military use of outer space is a matter requiring specific agreement and cannot be accomplished through the enunciation of broad legal principles. A statement of United States intentions along the lines of that recommended above for use in the General Assembly might also be used in the Outer Space Committee. Private discussions should be phased to provide some clarification of the matter as early as possible during the General Assembly. The tactical recommendations suggested above should be modified to reflect progress in or the outcome of the private discussions. Development of a firm position respecting the approach to be taken at the resumed session of the Geneva Conference (scheduled for November 12) should reflect possible debate in the Outer Space Committee and the General Assembly as well as the progress or outcome of private discussions.

c. Both in private discussions or public debate, the United States would have to draw a distinction between the use of earth satellites for carrying nuclear

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weapons and their use for other military purposes, including their use for carrying human observers or optical equipment. In making such a distinction, the United States should not over-emphasize the "threat" posed by nuclear weapons satellites. To do so would be inconsistent with the facts of the matter, would increase the psychological impact of possible future Soviet activities or claims, and would make more difficult domestic acceptance of the type of measure suggested above. In view of these considerations, the United States should consistently hold to the position that the problem is not an urgent one but that since neither country would stand to gain militarily from using earth satellites to carry nuclear weapons, it would be desirable and relatively simple to rule out this possibility.

d. In defending the use of outer space for military purposes other than the placing in orbit of weapons of mass destruction, the United States should draw as necessary on materials which have been prepared and approved for this purpose (NSC Action 2454). Emphasis should be placed on the virtual impossibility of distinguishing, even with pre-launch inspection, between civilian and military uses of outer space other than in the case of space weapons.

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